

KEMBLE COAL & IRON COMPANY, RIDDLESBURG WORKS
Riddlesburg
Bedford County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-362

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
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Location: Riddlesburg
Bedford County
Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1807, 1870s, 1910s, 1940s

Present Use: Interpretive Site

Significance: Although this site contained an iron furnace as early as 1807, the remnants of the pig-iron producing operation date from the 1910s through the 1940s. This includes a (ca. 1906) building that likely served as the blowing engine house for the blast furnaces and a battery of stone and brick constructed beehive coke ovens.

Historians: Elaine J. Will, 1992; Kim E. Wallace, 1994.

Project Information: The results of the study of Bedford County were published in 1994: Kim Wallace (ed), Bedford County and Fulton County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service). The contents of the publication were transmitted to the Library of Congress as individual reports. Research notes, field photos and copies of historic photos collected during the project were transmitted to the AIHP Collection, Special Collections, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA 15705.

Riddlesburg is situated along the narrow river bed between two mountain ridges and on a small triangle of lowland where Six Mile Run flows into the Raystown branch of the Juniata. Its linear plan parallels the streams. A number of company houses are extant along TR 576. A few of these houses are abandoned though most are still in use and have been altered with additions and metal siding. A few buildings survive that appeared on an 1877 map of the town, including the superintendent's house and the Methodist church. Buildings that appear to be at about the same site and might also date from before 1877 include a store, office, hotel, boarding house, and the town's railroad depot. The depot has been expanded and modified for use as a church. Rows of coke ovens survive along SR 1036 near the old furnace site. Most of the furnace complex was demolished. The foundations of the stockhouse are visible along with a small one-story frame building and a larger one-story brick building. This latter structure probably served as a blowing engine house, operated in conjunction with the blast furnaces. This building is now used as part of the saw mill that operates on the site.

Settlers discovered coal in the Broad Top area in the late eighteenth century. At least one attempt was reported to market the coal in the 1790s by rafting it down the Raystown branch of the Juniata. About 1800 Samuel Riddle, a Bedford lawyer and later a judge, bought a large tract of land from a Broad Top resident and launched a more concerted effort to exploit Broad Top resources. He opened a coal mine along Six Mile Run and, according to one source, built warehouses and houses for miners. In addition to coal, he shipped lumber, walnuts, and grain to Port Deposit or Havre de Grace on the Chesapeake Bay via the Juniata and Susquehanna rivers. About 1815 he laid out a town called Allensport where Six Mile Run joined the Raystown branch, but it was never developed.

The Huntingdon and Broad Top Mountain Railroad was constructed in the 1850s to make coal mining viable on a large scale. The Six Mile Run branch of the railroad was begun in 1856. It left the main line at the former Allensport site and ran about a mile to the mining villages of Six Mile Run and Coaldale and eventually extended to North Point. A few houses were built at the railroad intersection and a coal mine was opened on railroad company property. The coal mine was called Mt. Equity, and the village was named Riddlesburg in honor of Samuel Riddle. In 1868 the Kemble Coal and Iron Company, organized by a group of New York investors, purchased the site and began building two iron furnaces, coke ovens, and a town for its workers. In 1884, Riddlesburg included a store, post office, church, school, and a public reading room in addition to residences. The store was first operated as an independent business but was sold to Kemble about 1878. The company opened limestone quarries near the town,

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leased the Mt. Equity coal mine, purchased at least five miles of iron ore lands along Tussey Mountain, and built a 6-mile-long, narrow-gauge railroad to transport the raw materials to the furnaces and ovens. Additional iron ore was obtained from mines at Dutch Corner and Wolfsburg in Bedford Township, Everett and Tatesville in West Providence Township, and the Cambria Iron Company's mine in Hopewell Township. The two 60' stone furnaces had 15' boshes and were heated by four Thayer hot blast stoves. In 1884 one furnace yielded thirty-six to thirty-eight tons of iron each day. A coal washer was added to the site in 1873 and was credited with improving one furnace's production from 140 tons to 200 tons of iron each week. At its peak of operation, Kemble reportedly employed over 500 people. Iron from Riddlesburg was used to make Singer sewing machines as well as about one-third of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad.

Details of Kemble Coal and Iron Company's operation through the remainder of the nineteenth century are sketchy and it is unclear whether the furnaces operated continuously or intermittently. By 1906, ownership had been transferred to the Colonial Iron and Coal Company which replaced at least one of the stone furnaces with a steel-constructed blast furnace in 1911. Colonial Iron and Coal operated the Riddlesburg complex intermittently until 1937. In July 1941, U.S. Pipe and Foundry Company negotiated a lease-purchase agreement with the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to take over the Riddlesburg property. The Alabama-based company formed a subsidiary, the Riddlesburg Coal and Iron Company, to run the operation. Three hundred men were employed to refurbish the furnace and reopen the company's coal mine. When U.S. Pipe took over the property, it included one blast furnace, three McClure stoves, 2,400 acres of coal land, and 216 coke ovens. Resurrection of the complex did not last. The furnace was dismantled about 1946. Baronig Baron Enterprises, the next owners of the property, built a coal washer on the furnace site and opened a mechanized mine at Kearney along Sandy Run. This operation ended when the washer was destroyed by fire in the early 1950s, and New Enterprise Stone and Lime Company bought the property.

In the early 1970s local residents began maintaining a row of coke ovens to preserve as a symbol of the Riddlesburg iron and coal industry. The coke oven site was donated to the Broad Township supervisors in 1992 and plans are being pursued to further preserve the ovens and build a small interpretive visitors' center.

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